

## Science Panel Warns of Bioweapons Future

By JOHN J. LUMPKIN

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WASHINGTON - Advances in biotechnology could lead to a generation of biological weapons far more dangerous than those currently known, scientists have told the CIA.

The life sciences experts, convened by the agency's Office of Transnational Issues, raised fears of genetically engineered diseases that "could be worse than any disease known to man," according to the CIA's unclassified report on their conference.

The report, "The Darker Bioweapons Future," speaks only generally of the dangers of newly created diseases and does not specify countries that could use them to threaten the United States.

"The same science that may cure some of our worst diseases could be used to create the world's most frightening weapons," the report says.

The report, dated Nov. 3, was posted this week on the Web site of the Federation of American Scientists, a government watchdog group. The group said the scientists met with the CIA in January.

Some advanced bioweapons already are possible to make, the scientists noted. They pointed to researchers in Australia who accidentally enhanced the mousepox virus by adding an immunoregulator gene, using a technique that could be applied to anthrax or smallpox, two diseases potentially capable of conversion into biological weapons.

The report also speaks of the possibility of designer diseases that would be immune to treatment, or that linger would inactivated in the body until the passage of a certain amount of time passes or until a specified second substance had entered the body.

Part of the danger of biological weapons, unlike conventional bombs or nuclear weapons, is their use might not be immediately obvious. Without a claim of responsibility or a lucky break by law enforcers, only when medical experts had traced an outbreak to its source would authorities learn that an attack had taken place.

"One panelist cited the possibility of a stealth virus attack that could cripple a large portion of people in their forties with severe arthritis, concealing its hostile origin and leaving a country with massive health and economic problems," the report says.

With so many potential threats, the experts proposed developing defenses aimed at strengthening the body's resistance to all disease, rather than creating treatments for individual diseases.